In every state of development the rebels fought against their enemies—forest officers, landlords, security forces, etc.—by mobilizing people on a large scale. In this way their area of operations expanded to the furthest corners of one of the most backward regions of our country. Armed squads played an important role in all stages, backed by various democratic organizations of the **Adivasis,** *women, or those dealing with culture.*

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

BASIC CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT IN PARTS OF CENTRAL INDIA BY THE MAOIST MOVEMENT (1980 TO THE 1990S)

by

Amit Bhattacharyya

Health Care

The Maoists take particular pride in the fact that their guerrillas have been providing honest medical services to the people since 1980–81 in areas where government medical centres are almost non-existent. There are cases where they saved the lives of people through their medical intervention. The people thereby place more confidence in the guerrillas than the government medical officers. They also took up education about matters relating to health. They set up medical units in different areas of struggling zones. They also have mobile medical units.

Some Observations

So far we have related, however briefly, the semi-feudal nature of the Indian economy with regional variations, the economy in the *Adivasi* area of the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra in the Dandakaranya revolutionary zone with characteristics of its own, and how that world got transformed for the better as a result of the Maoist movement. We have also touched upon some of the changes that have been taking place in the realm of superstructure, role of women and other issues. It has been a very brief survey based primarily on rare investigation reports prepared by those who play a role in this ongoing process in the face of mounting adversity. India needs more and more William Hintons and more and more "fanshens" to analyze and relate the changes that have been silently taking place in the Indian countryside, but are concealed from public gaze and knowledge.

Excerpted from Part IV of

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN:

IMPERIALIST VERSUS PEOPLE'S MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

Another issue associated with the marriage system is the system of *babapare (kanyashulkam*, i.e., bride-price[291]). The amount can rise as high as thousands of *rupees*. Those who cannot afford to pay "babapare" are called *lamade* and have to work in the wife's family for six years to make the payment by manual labour. *Lamade* is practiced strongly in the *Adivasi* areas. It is, however, not seen among the Rajgonds. There one can witness a democratic way of selection and women can start living with the man of her choice without any formal tie-ups. This is called *lon hodiyana* or "entering the house."

The Maoist activists made widespread propaganda on the *babapare* issue and formulated certain norms. Thus the amount was decreased to hundreds of *rupees*. However, in areas where the revolutionary forces were weak, the tribal heads carried on the old system. It is pertinent to relate here one interesting episode.[292] One woman of Kondamito came to the house of a man of Koyamdud based on mutual choice. But the woman's family wanted "babapare" from the man's family, so they attacked the man's house and forcibly took Rs. 22,500. The DK women's organization tried to stop it but failed. Finally, the People's War leadership intervened and handed over the issue to the range committee. They made them return Rs. 14,000 in front of the people who had gathered from six villages. The *babapare* cases are seldom nowadays.

Changes that could thus be identified are as follows: 1. Parents no longer marry their children by force; 2. *Babapare* normally does not incur high amounts; 3. Women exercise their choice during marriage. If they are forced against their will, they bring it to the notice of the mass organization and get justice. This has naturally had a marked impact on the women. 4. Before, the victims of marriage were neglected. Suicide rate was fairly high among women. In the wake of the revolutionary movement, it has substantially been reduced.

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[291] Bride price was the feature of feudal China too. In China, the family of the groom would pay the price—calculated notionally—to the family of the girl as the price for raising their daughter. That price was known as the "bride-price." It implied that the daughter was thus being sold out to her husband's family. In the Indian Hindu society, there prevailed a custom—still in vogue in conservative families—whereby it is the family of the girl rather than that of the boy that gives the money. The idea behind the *babapare* system bears some resemblance to the Chinese feudal custom.

[292] Bhupati's Report, pp. 35–36.

As a result of these, some changes were noticeable in social life:

1. Men stopped misbehaving with women to a large extent;
2. The slogan "Equal wages for equal work" was implemented. Women no longer felt inferior that they could not earn more wages;
3. Women joined political as well as guerrilla activities;
4. Men started to learn to respect women's opinions;
5. The squads also raised the consciousness to some extent that women had a right over children and property;
6. Patriarchy was combated and there was the assertion of women's rights in domestic affairs. In fact, as the present report and other reports indicated, women were so encouraged to take part in such activities that even the squad members sometimes failed to keep pace with their mounting aspirations.[290]

Changes in the Marriage System

Attempts to bring about changes in the system of marriage are far more difficult than the fight against economic and sexual exploitation. Here the change in the realm of superstructure is slow and gradual.

In the tribal society, marriage among cousins is a normal feature. The revolutionary government in China banned marriages between seven generations. The DK people were not educated about the ill-effects of such marriages from the point of view of medical science. The squads were not educated either. To them, such marriages were considered natural. In such marriages, the opinion of the parents was decisive. Those who violated the decisions were tortured. Unwilling grooms were forced to marry. However, in the years after 1980, such things started to change. Parents did not dare to apply force. Earlier, women who left their husbands were called "kerde"—a derogatory term and were harassed. They were the victims of an unjust society; but now they are no longer so.

[290] Ibid., pp. 35–36.

The World Turned Upside Down: Basic Changes Brought About in Parts of Central India by the Maoist Movement (1980 to the 1990s)

This paper is about the impact of the Maoist movement on the economy and society in parts of the Gadchiroli area of Maharashtra. This region is part of a far bigger zone called Dandskaranya.

Dandakaranya is a vast region located in central India, with slices taken from five different states of India. It embraces parts of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. It is very rich in forest and mineral resources and spread over one *lakh* and ten thousand square kilometers embracing 11 districts. It comprises such areas as Adilabad, Khammam, East Godavari and Vishakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh; Gadchiroli, Chnadrapura and Bhandara of Maharashtra; Bastar and Rajnandgaon of Chhattisgarh; Balaghat of Madhya Pradesh and Koraput and Malkangiri of Odisha. The area has a population of around two *crores*. People of several tribes such as the Gond, Madia, Govari, Kondu, Kondareddy, Nayakapu, Dorla, Muria (Koya) and Odiya tribes of Ouruja, Gudijursa, Butar, Durva, etc. live in Dandakaranya (henceforth DK).

This region is one of the richest in terms of being the reservoir of forest, water and mineral wealth. The Jagdalpur market in Bastar alone is considered to be Asia's largest trading centre for forest produce, with a yearly trade of over Rs. 1,000 *crore* in tamarind, Mahua flowers and seeds, sal seeds, gum, etc. Godavari, Indravati and Pranhita are the three major rivers, along with a number of medium-sized rivers crisscrossing the region. There are extensive deposits of minerals such as iron ore, bauxite, dolomite, granite, marble, limestone, corundum, mica, manganese, etc.

From the early days of British colonial rule down to the present-day, the British imperialists, native princes and the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie plundered the wealth of the region, made and broke promises and subjected the sons and daughters of the soil to deprivation and exploitation. The people of the land fought many battles against them, such as the Palakot revolt of 1825 in north Bastar against the joint Maratha-British rule; the Meiriya revolt of 1852-62 against the same enemies; the revolts

against the colonial Forest Acts against the British from 1910 to 1914 and then again in the 1960s against the local *raja* (ruler); and made immense sacrifices.

The *Adivasi* people of the DK region have been victims of exploitation of three types. First, the ruling classes have retained the age-old socio-economic structure and the backwardness of people and the region. Second, the local people have been subjected to ruthless exploitation by the landlords, traders, usurers and government officials. Third, the exploitation by the MNC-comprador bureaucrat capitalist combines who have displaced thousands, polluted rivers, cut down their forests and reduced the *Adivasis* to an existence that beggars description. The lack of education, cultural backwardness and superstition have forced them to live in bestial conditions. They suffered from perennial hunger, malnutrition and went without clothing. With no health centres and medicine, the extent of early death among them was remarkably high. Over and above this, the patriarchal social structure subjected women to all conceivable forms of exploitation, indignity and humiliation. Neither any central nor any state government had ever taken any steps to bring about improvement in their living conditions and the region. The Maoist movement commenced against this background in late 1980 when a number of CPI(ML) People's War activists—split up into groups—entered Gadchiroli and Bastar from Andhra Pradesh to spread the message of revolution. On November 2, 1980, Peddi Sankar, a coal mine worker and squad member, was shot down by the Maharashtra police. The Maoists hailed him as the first martyr of the Dandakaranya struggle.[275]

When I opted to write on this theme, I did not realize that it could be so difficult to get a grip on it. It was not difficult because there is not much information about the semi-feudal system in India, nor because there is paucity of information about the new social experiments that had been taking place in different parts of the country under the guidance of the Maoist leadership. There is no dearth of information either about the semi-feudal economy of India or about the alternative developmental work being carried on at the initiative of the people. A number of studies have already been done on different regions, and many more are being con-

[275] Sudhakar, "A Saga of twenty-five years of Glorious struggle An Epic of People's Radical Transformation" in *People's March*, Vol. 7, No.1, January 2006.

Changes in Man-Woman Relations

One of the most remarkable changes that took place was in the realm of man-woman relationships. The struggles of hundreds of women organized under the banner of the Krantikari Mahila Sangh (KAMS/Revolutionary Tribal Women's Organization) and their heroic sacrifices contributed to this change. The local officers of the forest department considered the work of men to be skilled or semi-skilled and that of women as unskilled—and paid them accordingly. The paper mills and other such establishments also did the same. The CPI(ML) People War activists opposed this practice and took up the struggle for equal wages and equality of men and women. The struggles conducted by women and the role played by the revolutionary movement established the rights of women for equal wages from the late 1980s. The suffering by women at work places thus came to a close.

Women fought so bravely in the struggles that men started demanding that women be incorporated into the organizations and accompany men to the rallies held in the town. That signified a tremendous positive change in the ideas of men.

Gotul dance is part of *Adivasi* tradition. Here both girls and boys dance, make merry and choose their life partners. Young men used to tease young girls, and it had social acceptance. Initially, whenever Maoist squads went to a village, the village arranged a dance in their honour. During the dance, the village heads encouraged squad members to catch hold of the girls. Women compulsorily attended such cultural programmes. The youth and outsiders took advantage of this and misbehaved with women. The majority of the young women did not like it. The squad members made a special effort to stop such practices. By degrees, the situation changed for the better. Gradually, the Sangh members won respect. Men and village heads stopped behaving in that way, which enhanced self-confidence among women. They realized through their own experience that they could rely on guerrilla squads in case of trouble of this type from the village youth, lumpen elements, government employees, papermill *babus*, *shahukars* and the village heads.

9. The role and intervention of banks in peasant's life became enhanced;
10. One section of farmers became assured that if irrigation was arranged and the fields well established, they would obtain more yields;
11. Before, the farmers sowed much in a small patch of land and now they have extended it to cover 45 percent of the total area. This naturally increased the total yield;
12. Use of tractors increased (the tractor can till 2 acres in 3 hours, the rent being Rs. 900);
13. New vegetables were introduced and marketed;
14. *Adivasi* traditional landlords began attaining capitalist character;
15. A new, nascent petit-bourgeois class appeared;
16. The purchasing power of the people increased;
17. The standard of living of the people improved. At present, each family obtains 8.25 *quintals* of paddy sufficient for nine and a half months;
18. A change in food was noticeable. The majority of peasants were able to eat rice two times a day along with soup in between;
19. Oil consumption and the use of cosmetics increased;
20. Fish and vegetables now formed part of the diet;
21. Consumption of clothes increased;
22. Bicycle, radio, tape recorder, TV, motor cycle, steel utensils, and other such consumer durables revealed an increase in consumer culture;
23. The domination of tribal heads in village affairs was weakened.[289]

[289] Ibid., p. 37.

ducted nowadays by scholars and academicians, generally in areas that are not those in struggle or even if so, in areas where the struggle is not intense and hence accessible. At the same time, we have gotten many reports from the struggling areas about the nature of developmental works that have been going on over the years, specifically in parts of central India known as the Dandakaranya region.

The main problem is getting information about the nature of land relations and the nature of revolutionary changes in the same area. The information that we get about changes does not specifically identify the areas. The names of villages or blocks are mentioned as A, B, or C. This is done clearly to thwart pinpointed attacks by state forces. These are reported in various party journals or journals published by non-party organizations, many of which are clandestine publications, without the names of the printer, publisher or place of publication. There are also studies or investigation reports of different areas on classes analysis, the nature of exploitation in the countryside, changes brought about by the revolutionary movement in those areas, etc., conducted by party activists for a long period, spanning two months or more. These were conducted in North Bastar, South Bastar, Gadchiroli and some other areas some years ago. Many of these reports were written in Telugu, Hindi, Chhattisgarhi Hindi, Marathi or other languages. Some of these were translated into English and reached our hands. The present paper is based on those reports.

There was a view prevalent among some of those political workers who entered DK that since there were classes in DK, there was no need of agrarian revolution and that the New Democratic Revolution (NDR) would not be applicable there. Since there was no feudal system, it was said that the NDR would not suit and would need a new name. Others held that even though there was no feudal system, there was the state, which was the representative of the comprador bourgeoisie and feudal classes, and that they would have to fight those enemies. They said that, "it would be a NDR."[276]

Thus the discussion of whether there were classes in DK or not went on from 1983 and was resolved when the Forest Committee was formed

[276] Report entitled "Various classes in Bastar—Our attitude" in *Viyukka*, September 2000.

in 1987.[277] In 1988, the Forest Committee resolved that there were classes in DK and exploitation was in the primitive stage. It said that though the feudal system was not as clear and definite as in other areas, exploitation was in the primitive stage and that they would have to deal with the various classes as per the understanding of NDR. In this paper, we propose to deal with Gadchiroli of Maharastra, which falls within DK, and the revolutionary changes brought about during the last two decades.

Gadchiroli district came into existence in Maharastra in 1982 with the merging of three *taluks*—the others being Sirincha and Etapalli. Its population then was 700,000, of which 45 percent were *Adivasis*. The district covers an area of 15,435 km2, eighty percent of which is filled with dense forests—primarily Chandrapur forests. The Maoist activists entered the area in late 1980. These forests are the home of a large number of *Adivasis,* especially *Gonds*.[278] Most of the forest people own small plots of land which are not very fertile. They live in poverty and backwardness, dependent partly on single crop, rain-fed agriculture and partly on the forests for their livelihood. The forests are rich in timber and bamboo and also provide *tendu* leaves, *mohua* flower and gum, among other valuable forest produce. All these have become sources of stremendous revenue for the forest department and the government that owns the forests. These forests are being exploited by the government for the benefit of the big paper mills owned by the comprador big bourgeoisie and big contractors. The net revenue of the forest department from timber and bamboo produce in 1981 was Rs. 110 million. The contractors and forest officials mint millions out of legal and illegal sale of teak, bamboo, etc.[279]

In contrast, the local villagers have now been induced to become cheap labour for the forest department. They are harassed and exploited in innumerable ways by the contractors and forest department employees. These people were once rulers of the jungles, but have now become wage slaves, while the departmental officials and the contractors have become the kings of the forests. The *Adivasis* have lost many of their rights over the

[277] The Forest Committee is the creation of the Maoist movement to protect natural resources from destruction and to resist entry and plunder by corporate capital.

[278] *Gonds* are an aboriginal group of about 2 million people in Central and South Central India.

[279] See report entitled "Chandrapur Forests—A Stir" in *Voice of the Vanguard*, Organ of the Central Committee, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (People's War), Vol. 1: September 7, 1983, pp. 9–11.

However, the report relates, a woman party member with two children had to remove her blouse (upper garment), which reveals the continued influence of patriarchal customs even in guerrilla bases. It is a different case with men. Unlike women, there is a lot of change in their dress and they look like those in the plains area. At a later period, however, the custom of doing away with the blouse for women was discarded and the practice of covering the upper body prevailed.

House: Before, people lived in grass houses. They had to renovate the roof every year and faced difficulty in getting free grass, as deforestation took its toll. So the poor people had to borrow money from the government or private individuals. The rich peasants covered their houses with brick. Now the situation changed. With the increase in income, everyone now has brick-houses. Improvements are seen in the houses. More steel-made articles/utensils are evident. Every member of the family has a plate and utensil with which to eat.

Economic Changes

Let us now summarize the economic changes in the life of the people in the area under review. Some of these changes are related to economic foundation and some to the superstructure. These are as follows:

1. Twenty percent of the absolute landless peasants gained new land;
2. In addition to the old land, 80 percent of the poor people obtained new land;
3. More than 50 percent of the people got new land;
4. Fundamental changes occurred in land relations;
5. Traditional exploitation became things of the past;
6. Brutal exploitation by the *shahukars* came to an end;
7. There was an increase in wages, employment and income;
8. Government reforms intensified and influenced the peasants in a negative way;

Improvements in the Livings Conditions of the People

As a result of this changing reality, the living conditions of the people also improved. This is attested by the following facts of great importance.

Food: Before, people filled their stomachs with rice soup and boiled horsegram in the morning. In the evening they had to be satisfied with limited rice. Now, they are able to eat rice in the morning and have a full meal in the evenings.

Oil: Before, people used less oil, which was taken from *vippa* seeds. In the new situation, this domestic industry, along with that of *gara* oil, made an exit. The majority of the peasants now use oil bought from the market. Similarly, in the earlier days, oil pressed out of *pusu* seeds was prepared for nourishing the hair; now, Parachute coconut oil has become popular.

Tea: Before, common people did not have that luxury to take tea; only rich families could have it. Now the majority of people drink tea every day.

Soap: Normally, people, mainly women, are fond of cosmetics. Young men and women decorate themselves and participate in dances. Such makeup is a normal feature now. The noticeable change is that the use of soap, powder and snow (cold cream) has increased. Every shop displays cosmetics, alongside tea powder, sugar, salt, chili powder, turmeric, tobacco and oil.

Vegetables: The use of vegetables increased. There is the addition of some new vegetables as favourites among the people like cauliflower and radish, introduced in the late 1980s. Brinjals, tomato, beans, bottle gourd, *gongura* and such other traditional vegetables continue to be used. These are also marketed.

Fish-breeding: Before, there was a scarcity of water for irrigating the land. Now most of the families are growing fish in ponds. Fish is marketed as well.

Clothes: Before, people did hardly have any clothing worth its name. Women had *dopa* (white cloth) and men had *panche* (*dhoti*), Marriage was nothing but a torture and half-nakedness for women. Such a situation changed in many areas. Women are now using blouses and sarees. Unmarried women are slowly getting used to wearing nighties and maxis.

forests. Whether it is grazing cattle, or collecting deadwood as timber, or even *mohua* flower to make their traditional drink, they find themselves at the mercy of the forest guards and the police. Paying them fines and bribes is commonplace.

What types of change were brought about in the Gadchiroli area is evident from a report[280] prepared in 2001 at the initiative of the Maoist Party. The field investigator, Bhupathi visited sixty villages in Gadchiroli. In every state of development the rebels fought against their enemies—forest officers, landlords, security forces, etc.—by mobilizing people on a large scale. In this way their area of operations expanded to the furthest corners of one of the most backward regions of our country. Armed squads played an important role in all stages, backed by various democratic organizations of the *Adivasis*, women or those dealing with culture.

In the preface to the report, the author stated:

> The revolutionary movement brought about many changes in various sectors in the division in the past two decades… changes occurred in land relations, traditional bonded labour, economic and other forms of exploitation, loan facilities, production relations, rising of a petit-bourgeois section, in the living conditions of the people… man-woman relations, education, medicine, customary celebrations and many such things. To put it in one word, the seeds for a fundamental change in the economic, political aspects have been sown. Our revolutionary movement is one [of the] main reason[s] for this change.[281]

Right from the beginning, the Maharastra government dealt with the Maoist movement in a way that had nothing novel about it. On the one hand, it adopted a policy of repression by spending millions of *rupees*; on the other, it initiated "developmental" works of different types, such as carrying out economic reforms. The other step was to develop a communication network by making roads connecting large parts of the interior,

[280] Bhupati, "Revolutionary Changes in Gadchiroli in Two Decades." It is a report in a raw state that I could gather. It is in the manuscript form, naturally having no printer's or publisher's name.

[281] Bhupati's Report, p. 9.

significantly, in those areas where radical struggles had already become a headache for them. The aim was not just to send police/para-military convoys, but also to establish a market link and exploit the remote villages in the forest area permanently. Electricity was provided to all districts. Most of the amount, as the report states, "is spent in our areas of operation." These reform programmes are aimed at misleading the people about such radical activities. Such changes have affected society in a big way, such as in the emergence of a section of students, employees, businessmen, contractors, etc.—the beneficiaries of such state-sponsored reforms; along with this, there is also an increase in the number of a semi-proletariat section in the villages. Let us now analyze the nature of changes brought about by the Maoists.

Changes in Land Relations

Needless to state, change in the land relations was closely tied up with the expansion of the squads. A poor farmer named Usandi of Gadder stated: "If not for our Party how could we get these lands? How could we secure the crops? We had to live with Kakku-Kuku-Pollejava Irku gugiri." (*Kakku* means tender bamboo, *kuku* is mushroom, *pollejava* is rice porridge, *irku* is *ippa* flower, *gugiri* is *gudalu*.) Such was his bitter experience. This was the experience not only of one villager, but of *Adivasis* in sixty villages. In fact, the decade of the 1980s was a turning point in their lives, as the revolutionary movement had the upper hand. This was followed by a period of brutal repression when the peasantry struggled hard to retain their hard-earned rights and privileges.

Until 1980, state governments gave "pattas" (land rights) over tribal land. While some farmers obtained it, most of the farmers did not. By 1980, the issuing of *pattas* was stopped. As a result, by 1980, 150,000 acres of land in the Etapalli taluk in Gadchiroli alone were outside the purview of the *patta* system. Normally, every peasant is eager to have land rights; it gives them the feeling that they are now independent and free from exploitation by forest officials. Local political leaders of different varying importance extracted money from the peasants to provide them with *pattas*; but they pocketed the money and deceived them. The urge for *pattas* was uppermost in the peasant's mind.

in bamboo work and in *tendu* leaf picking caused them to take part in this kind of work. In this way, another important instrument of feudal exploitation became a thing of the past.

How did the Maoist movement affect village life? In the pre-1980 phase, landlord families normally enjoyed the posts of social status by heredity. The police *patel* post that happened to be representative of the exploitative government was in the hands of these families. Other traditional posts such as *patel*, *bhumyal*, *shendyal* (tribal head) also were in their hands. They controlled village life, having absolute say in all matters. In the bad old days, it was unimaginable for the farmers and agricultural labourers to stay independent of this network. The *permal*-priests who looked after cultural affairs were also under the control of this network. In case of problems between tribal heads or problems related to more than one village, they met in a large gathering to pronounce judgements. Sometimes the Ahiri king also attended.

Such a socio-political network, quite strong before 1980, was weakened in the later period. The radical mass organizations came to the fore and started to take control over *panchayet* matters, and also in the contradictions between tribal heads and the people. Members of the mass organizations and also CPI(ML) (People's War) squads met *Adivasi* families and listened to their problems. This was the situation in 1990. Those who were accustomed to seeing people bowing their heads before them now themselves bowed their heads before the people when they attended meetings called by people's mass organizations. With the exploiting classes stepping aside from the leadership of the village level, broad sections of the people—poor, middle and rich peasants came to take the centre stage. Local men and women gained a new experience as armed guerrillas, the majority of whom came from the basic masses. It was somewhat like what William Hinton, in his study of the Long Bow village in revolutionary China during the Yanan days, had described as "fanshen" or turning things upside down. This signaled the beginning of new organs of people's power.

Rise of Petit-Bourgeois Class at the Village Level

During the period under review, a considerable section of students, intellectuals, employees and those in various professions came into existence. There was the presence of women among them as well.

assuming feudal characteristics in the process, though still retaining some of its tribal character.[288]

Similarly, it is difficult to compare the local landlords with the landlords with which we are familiar. They are local landlords with tribal traits. Since the agricultural labourers also have tribal characters, they do consider the landlords to be feudal *doras*. Here the tribal bond probably prevails in their mind.

What type of relationship is there between the tribal landlords and the landless farmer-agricultural labourers? Mainly exploitative. However, considerable changes took place over the decades. As there were no big anti-feudal struggles against the landlords and as their land was not seized, they remained economically very powerful and exploited the people. For example, they took advantage of the *arogato* method still prevalent among the *Adivasis*—where anyone could call the villagers to work in their fields in exchange for one meal a day—and made the people work for them.

The advent of Maoists changed this reality. Many farmers now obtained new lands. The poor peasants got additional lands ("jabaran" land included), The bad old days gradually became things of the past. Now they had to work on their own lands. Thus the *arogato* system gradually disappeared, thereby destroying the traditional form of exploitation by the tribal landlords.

The section that obtained new lands became stronger. Similarly, the poor peasantry also cut down trees and gained additional land. In addition to land, their income also increased from other sources; they could now buy cattle and tractors. Once upon a time, when they had no land or had a bit of it, they worked as *oryul*, i.e., labourers in the houses of the landlords. They stayed in the houses of the landlords' families from June to January or January to May. There they were given food and clothing along with three *quintals* (1 *quintal* is 100 kg) of paddy per annum as salary/wages. They were forced to work as beasts throughout the day in the house as well as in the field. Moreover, they also had to submit their earnings procured from work done outside, such as bamboo work and tendu leaf plucking, to the landlords. Such labourers also got lands in the wake of the revolutionary movement and no longer needed to work for wages. The increase in wages

[288] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

There is thus no surprise in the fact that the Maoist squads mobilized the farmers with the slogan "land to the tiller"—which perfectly conformed to the main objective of the New Democratic Revolution. Thus the people fought heroically against the forest department for rights to agricultural lands not just in Gadchiroli, but throughout Dandakaranya. Between 1981 and 1984, in Ahiri taluka alone, 18 villages of Jammalagutta range, 10 to 12 villages of Pranhita range, and nearly 10 villages of Diselipeta range together brought 20,000 acres of previously uncultivated land under agriculture. The news spread far and wide. The result was that many families migrated to these places from far-away places such as Kamalapur, Chalwada, Ummanur, Rayagatta, Marneli and other villages. It was their land, their world, where the rule of the oppressive governments and forest officials were beyond imagination. They started to settle down and till the land. "It was widely propagated that there was no atrocity of the forest department and lands could be tilled."[282] The decade of the 1980s thus saw the migration of a number of landless, poor and middle-class farmers to those areas of struggle. This migration was so heavy that the Maoist Party at one stage had to put a ban on the felling of trees in the forests "due to many reasons."[283] They were unable to control migration until 1995; this problem continued to haunt Gadchiroli squads in the future as well.

The lands over which possession or ownership rights were established through struggle were called *jabaran* land as opposed to *patta* land. And a time came when *jabaran* lands became greater in quantity than *patta* lands. There was another related issue: until the mid-1980s, the Maoist leadership also mobilized the Gadchiroli farmers on the problem of land *pattas*. However, later they said that the state government had become irrelevant and organized the peasantry directly to have the crops. This signaled the beginning and assertion of a new political power—new democratic power—in place of the old. Thus along with changes in objective reality, ideas also underwent a transformation. So by 1990, no party had the option of mobilizing the peasantry with the demand for *pattas*.

Most of the farmers in the areas of struggle in the Gadchiroli division tilled the forest lands. Those of Ahiri accumulated more new lands. They brought in new land in two ways. One was through cutting trees in

[282] Ibid., p. 10.

[283] Ibid., p. 12.

a totally new area—in some distant places—to start tilling it. The second way was to procure the necessary land adjacent to their lands whenever necessary.

There is no doubt that basic changes took place in land relations, as the following facts would testify. These are details of the 497 families in the 15 villages.[284]

Number of families with *patta* land		398
	Land they hold	1748.25 acres
Number of families that had forest land		251
	Land they hold	924.75 acres
Number of families dependent only on new *Jabaran* lands		99
	Jabaran land they hold	424 acres

According to the findings of the field-investigator, poor people gained new lands as a result of the revolutionary movement.

Bonded Labour System and Other Forms of Socio-Economic Exploitation

In these areas, economic and other forms of exploitation by village heads continued until the end of the 1980s. However, there was a difference in the nature of exploitation between those that occurred before 1980 and those during the decade that followed. As the movement gained momentum, changes took place in this field as well. However, the rural peasantry could not break the traditional shackles the same way they broke those of the officials of the forest and revenue departments and the police. The backward, exploited peasantry continued to respect the traditions, superstitious customs and unscientific beliefs associated with *Adivasi* culture. That proves that the superstructure does not change automatically along with changes in base; some conscious efforts are needed to bring that about.

[284] Ibid., p. 12.

Maoists' paddy cooperative societies. In response, the CPI(ML) People's War leadership adopted the policy of convincing the people of the need to boycott the government-sponsored loan-fairs.

Developments in Market and Commercial Activities

Tribal agriculture dependent on nature is not meant for the market, but for domestic consumption. The report showed that there was a considerable increase in the purchasing power of the *Adivasis* during 1980–2000, leading to an increase in purchases from the market. Needless to say, this was accompanied by the expansion of the market. For this, the revolutionary played a major role. What were the main factors behind the expansion of the market? The increase in wages is the most obvious factor. In fact, the increase was about 20 times. Along with it, there was a 24 times increase in the price of *tendu* leaf. The radical mass organizations fought against the exploiters and government officials, demanding a proper rate for their labour. As a result, the Thapars—one of the representatives of the big capitalists—who until 1983 paid 0.25 *paise* for one bamboo stick agreed to pay Rs. 7.10 in 2000–01.

The income of the farmers increased, but they did not have ownership rights over forests. They have started to realize that this ownership right was tied up with the success of the New Democratic Revolution.[287]

Changes in the Relations Between Landlords, Landless Farmers and Agricultural Labourers

Tribal society, as we find it today, is not a pre-class society. From groups of people depending on food-gathering, they long ago turned to food production by clearing the jungle for agriculture. This shift to agriculture also marked the first step to the emergence of the peasantry in the *Adivasis*. It has become a class society. However, it is difficult to identify it as a feudal society, or these classes with those classes "absolutely." At the same time, as Bhupati argued in his report, tribal characteristics do not dominate this society. "We can say this is a semi-tribal society or semi-feudal society having tribal characters." In fact, it is a society in transition,

[287] Ibid., p. 17.

Let us now turn to what the Mirkal peasants say about how the tribal "landlords" used to run the "pechula" interest business.

> Normally, if the loan, in terms of money and paddy is given to farmers of the same village, no interest is charged. This is the custom…. But if the loan is given to persons of a neighbouring village, they ("landlords") used to take 37 kilos for every 150 kilos of paddy as loan.

Such a practice of taking loans for meeting expenses connected with marriage or death, besides other reasons, decreased substantially as a result of the revolutionary movement. The eradication of loans was caused by the formation of "paddy cooperative societies" at the initiative of the Maoist Party. Here three factors were important: First, improvement in the living condition of the people; second, paddy cooperative societies; third, the role played by the revolutionary committees.

Before the spread of the revolutionary movement, the *Adivasi* peasants acquired government loans only nominally. However, with the consolidation and spread of the movement, the government sought to allure the people with "loan melas" (loan fairs) to wean the villagers away from the movement. In 1897, ten policemen died in the first ambush in Adilabad district. That was followed by the pumping in of more and more loans of various types. Besides loan fairs, the government also allotted money in the cultural fields such as the construction of a modern *gotul* (common meeting place) house with a TV in place of the old. Thereby they were trying to keep the villagers away from the revolutionary movement. At the same time, the government started giving loans for collective marriages at marriage-fairs set up specifically for this purpose. They gave incentive funds for both inter-tribal marriages and also those between tribal and non-tribals. However, these loans generally went to the rich peasants, and people coming from higher classes and having high connections.

Another pertinent point here is that as people joined the revolutionary movement in large numbers, those areas were transformed into areas of intense class struggle. Hence the government adopted the policy of surrender to the government. Add to this is the fact that these government loans were available not only in cash, but in kind, too, such as in rice and other things. It is clear that this loan in kind was aimed at countering the

At a place called Ahiri, there was a kingdom that continued to exercise control over the people from colonial times. Even after 1947, this "family" rules in the traditional style. They were blood-seekers in the past; they remained so in the post-colonial period as well. This family used to celebrate *dasara* festival[285] in a "grand" way. The farmers were terrorized at the time of *dasara* by goons sent by the Ahiri family. Let us see what seventy-year-old Gadder farmer, Pandu Thimma, said about it.

> Kandar Inam Saheb Godsun from Ahiri used to bring the word of *dasara*. The Patel, Bhumiyal and the villagers used to gather near the *gotul* [traditional place of meeting] and discuss. One and a half kilos of *ippa* oil was collected from every village. One goat, one big hen, 20 kgs of rice, two women and two men (*leyyor*) for dancing were gathered from each *patti* (one *patti*=60 villages). Patel, Bhunyial and some males from the village went to Ahiri on a cart. This took ten days' time. The Patel bowed to the king and submitted one *rupee* to him. The salary of the Patel was Rs. 10. The people were taxed if they miss even a single aspect. We could not avoid giving them.[286]

On receiving the information, the peasants went in large numbers to Ahiri to do labour of all sorts. They also took part in a lot of bonded labour meant for the "goddeses of the village" in the following ways: 1) *Ippa* flower collected on the first day had to be submitted to them; 2) After the initial showers their lands had to be tilled; 3) The ordinary farmers had to bear all the punishments meted out on the pretext of violating the norms; 4) "Arogato" was the main traditional form of exploitation of labour. It was a method by which anyone could call the villagers to work in their fields in lieu of one meal a day. The landlord would have lots of agricultural and domestic work for the peasants to do.

However, after the entry of the armed squads and the consolidation of the revolutionary movement, such things came to a stop. People from

[285] The *dasara* festival is a Hindi festival celebrating the defeat of a ten-headed demon king.
[286] Ibid., p. 14.

Ahiri, Etapalli and Bhumragarh areas have stopped participating in the *dasara* festival in response to the boycott call by the Maoists.

The Maoist squads took up propaganda against the traditional/other forms of exploitation from the beginning. The strength of the revolutionary movement was based mainly on the support of two tribes, namely Koya (Rajagondu) and Gotte (Madia). The Rajagonds are relatively more conscious socially. The squads gained support in the tribal world by taking up this burning issue of exploitation. In fact, until 1990, the Rajagonds were the main constituents of the guerrilla forces.

Meanwhile, various people's democratic organizations emerged, which highlighted several immediate and long-term issues. By 1990, fifteen thousand peasants formed part of the Dandakaranya *Adivasi* Ryutu Coolie Sangham (DARCS)/DK Agricultural Workers Organization, half of which were in the Krantikari Asivasi Mahila Sangham (KAMS)/*Adivasi* Women's Organization. There were at that time 61 party cells, 64 militia teams (Gram Raksha Dalam), all of which helped in the propaganda work in a big way. Thus the exploitation by the tribal heads ended because of the radical movement. Moreover, primary changes in the production relations, land relations, increase of production and social changes helped a lot. The government officials did not dare to enter the villages.

Such changes, needless to state, were not easy; there were many ups and downs. In the Gadchiroli division, various forms of feudal or traditional exploitation had been eliminated, but the tribal head still continued to have a say in superstructural issues of the village. True, village heads did not dare to bring back old forms of exploitation; however, mass organizations under the influence of the revolutionary movement were sometimes not in a position to intervene in the "cultural affairs of the village." The government was still dependent on *patels* to get information about the village and these *patels* were considered "police patels."

Changes in Rural Loan Facilities, Money-Lending and Bank Loans

In the past, the *Adivasis* had been subjected to various forms of exploitation. It is well known that the non-tribals considered the tribal areas as a "golden duck." Many traders went to the tribal hamlets, sold ordinary food material and cosmetic material and pocketed a huge profit.

There are instances when the *Adivasis* surrendered their prized possessions and also land to the outsiders. The story is the same with "Diku" of Chhotonagpur, "Payika" of Bastar, "Koskir" of Maad (Aboojmaad or unknown hills), "Komati," "Gandia" of Gadchiroli, etc. These outsiders exploited people in many ways.

The farmers suffer for lack of food during the months of July and August. Crops are not ripe by then; the paddy is for seeds, not for consumption. So they have to borrow from money-lenders for their maintenance. In 1984, the peasants of Moyinben peta related the nature of exploitation by the *shahukar* (moneyed man) named Sala Kanakayya of the village Ele to the guerrilla squad. "Kanakayya *shahukar* gave us 80 kg of *jowar* and took that much of *gingelly*. This was the peak of exploitation. During that period, while one kilo of *jowar* cost Rs. 2, one kilo of *gingelly* cost more than Rs. 10." This made the peasants very angry. The *shahukars* acted as private rural bankers to the peasants, another advantage for them. The farmers stored money with the *shahukars* as we do in the banks, and withdraw it whenever necessary. The *shahukar*, in his turn, used it for his own business. Such forms of exploitation were in vogue before the expansion of the revolutionary movement.

The spread of the revolutionary movement put a brake on this exploitation. The Maoists who entered this area were newcomers; they had to grapple with many new things. They could appreciate the situation from the experiences of struggles in Srikakulam, Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh. They called for "famine raids" during 1989–90; in response, people attacked the house of Eke Kanakayya with vengeance. Many *shahukars* became panicky and shifted to the towns in the face of people's wrath.

What to do with the businessmen? The decision was arrived at after much discussion. Business was important. If the necessities of the people were not fulfilled, then the Party and the guerrilla army would also face problems. But the Maoists took some preventive measures to curb their greed for unlimited profits. They made it clear that improper measurements would not be allowed, that products had to be sold at a proper and justified rate, they should not be of poor quality and should not make a profit of more than ten percent on the material they brought from the town to sell. Later, prices were fixed by the Party. The task was then entrusted to the DAKMS (Dandakaranya tribal peasants and workers' organization).